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ABSTRACT

This report related the findings of the United Kindgom Reading Association's Research Subcommittee which surveyed teachers to determine the answers to three questions. Responses to the first question revealed seven main areas with which children have difficulty in learning to read: language and speech; auditory discrimination; the mastery of phonic stages; visual discrimination; memory span; unhelpful parental attitudes; and lack of experiences in the home. Responses to the second question revealed areas where teachers have the most difficulty in teaching children to read: giving individual help; the lack of suitable materials; language and speech problems; lack of motivation on the part of children; the mastery of phonic stages; emotional difficulties; and auditory discrimination. And responses to the third question revealed six areas where help and advice were needed: the low learner and children with specific difficulties; help in the classroom and from outside advisors; specific items of material and apparatus; suitable games, activities, materials; diagnosing difficulties and diagnostic measures; and reference booklets on specific aspects of reading. (HOD)

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UNITED KINGDOM READING ASSOCIATION

INQUIRY INTO READING AND THE USE OF ENGLISH

Introduction.

On 16th April, 1973, a letter was sent from the Secretary to the Bullock Committee to the President of the United Kingdom Reading Association asking for the views of the Association on the kind of research into reading that is required at this present time. This letter was referred to the Chairman of the Research Sub-Committee by the President, as this Sub-Committee is at present carrying out an investigation aimed at establishing the areas where teachers experience most difficulty in the teaching of reading. It would be reasonable to assume that areas of difficulty in the learning and teaching of reading reported by a considerable number of teachers would indicate some of the problems which need to be researched. Therefore in answer to the letter mentioned above, the Research Sub-Committee has prepared the following interim report on its present investigation.

Report of the Research Sub-Committee.

One of the aims of the United Kingdom Reading Association is to stimulate and promote research in reading, and to further this aim a Research Sub-Committee was established in 1972.

In order to stimulate research which would directly influence classroom activities, the Research Sub-Committee decided that the main aims of their first project should be:

1. to identify practical difficulties;
2. to encourage teacher participation in the investigation of these difficulties;
3. to report back the findings to all teachers in a clear and meaningful way.

In order to identify the practical difficulties, U.K.R.A. members and teachers from selected Local Authorities were asked, in the early months of 1973, to complete a questionnaire, (copies attached), giving answers to the following three questions:

Question 1. In your experience what are the main difficulties children have in <u>learning</u> to read?

Question 2. What are the main difficulties you have found in <u>teaching</u> children to read?

Question 3. In what areas in the teaching of reading would you welcome help and advice?

At the time of writing this interim report, 188 completed questionnaires have been received, 90 from Infant teachers, 34 from Junior teachers and 64 from Remedial teachers.

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Analysing the responses, it was noted that the difficulties encountered by Infant, Junior and Remedial teachers, although similar in many respects, did show some differences, and so in addition to presenting an overall analysis of the responses to all three questions, the responses by the three groups of teachers have been analysed separately.

With regard to questions 1 and 2, concerning the learning and teaching of reading, difficulties mentioned in both areas were very similar, and so it was decided to analyse the responses to both questions in the same way. The responses recorded to the first two questions were grouped in 18 different areas for purposes of analysis and study; the areas are listed below and where necessary for clarification, the responses subsumed under these headings are included:

1. Physical difficulties - speech defects, health problems, hearing difficulties, difficulties with vision, and cross laterality.

2. Auditory discrimination.

3. Visual discrimination.

4. Poor retention span.

5. Language and speech - restricted language development, lack of language facility, impoverished home backgrounds, shortage of books and lack of interest in home reading, slovenly, immature speech.

6. Lack of suitable experiences in the home.

7. Unhelpful parental attitudes - little reading and talking at home, too much pressure from the home regarding learning to read.

8. Lack of understanding of the purpose of reading.

9. Difficulty in mastering the phonic stages - blending of sounds frequently mentioned here.

10. Difficulty in developing later reading skills - comprehension and fluency.

11. Lack of suitable materials - unsuitable reading schemes, lack of suitably graded material and insufficient material.

12. Lack of motivation.

13. Lack of concentration.

14. Emotional difficulties - lack of confidence because of failure.

15. Difficulties in giving individual help - difficult to fit in everything, lack of time, large classes, more help needed from other adults.

16. Diagnosing reading problems.

17. Problems of classroom organisation.

18. Lack of continuity of schooling.

The responses from the three groups of teachers to question 3, concerning help and advice, were somewhat different from the responses to the first two questions, and so these responses were grouped into 17 rather different areas for the purpose of analysis and study. Below are the 17 areas and where necessary the responses subsumed under these headings are included:

1. Advice on suitable games, activities, material and apparatus - mainly for developing early perceptual skills and later phonic skills.

2. The need for specific items of material and apparatus.

3. Advice in the pre-reading and reading readiness areas - indication as to when a child is ready for reading, the use of reading readiness tests.

4. Advice on percertual skills - mainly concerned with visual and auditory discrimination and visual memory.

5. Advice on reading materials - information on new schemes, the grading of books from various reading schemes.

6. Advice on the teaching of different aspects of phonics - mainly concerned with planning the order of teaching phonic elements and the relationship between phonic and look / say approaches.

7. Advice on language and speech problems.

8. Advice on diagnosing difficulties and diagnostic methods.

9. Advice on teaching the slow learner and children with specific difficulties.

10. Advice on developing more advanced skills and a comprehensive programme.

11. The need for help in the classroom and from outside advisors - mainly the help of additional staff in the classroom and from outside specialists.

12. Advice on classroom and school organisation.

13. Need for smaller classes.

14. Advice on encouraging parents to help their children.

15. The need for reference booklets on specific aspects of reading - important research results, vocabulary lists of reading schemes, lists of suitable books for different purposes.

16. The need for more training in the teaching of reading - pre-service and in-service courses.

17. The need for a service offering immediate inspection of new materials, apparatus and kits.

ANALYSIS.

Now follows an analysis of the 188 completed questionnaires for each of the three questions in turn and for each question there is both an overall analysis and an analysis by groups.

Questions 1. In your experience what are the main difficulties children have in learning to read?

Table 1. Overall Analysis

Areas.	Number of Responses	Order of Importance
Physical difficulties	29	7
Auditory discrimination	60	2
Visual discrimination	57	4
Poor retention	44	5
Restricted language	82	1
Lack of suitable experiences	25	9
Unhelpful parental attitudes	31	6
Lack of understanding of purpose	9	14
Difficulty in mastering phonics	59	3
Difficulty in developing fluency	4	16
Lack of suitable materials	22	10
Lack of motivation	22	10
Lack of concentration	29	7
Emotional difficulties	22	10
Difficulties in giving individual help	13	13
Diagnosing problems	1	18
Problems of classroom organisation	2	17
Lack of continuity of schooling	7	15

Table 2. Analysis by Groups.

Areas.	Infant		Junior		Remedial	
	No.Responses	Importance	No.Responses	Importance	No.Responses	Importance
Physical difficulties	17	6	6	7	6	9
Auditory discrimination	25	2	13	2	22	3
Visual discrimination	24	4	9	3	24	2
Poor retention	17	6	7	5	20	4
Restricted language	51	1	16	1	15	5
Lack of suitable experiences	16	9	5	9	4	12
Unhelpful parental attitudes	18	5	7	5	6	9
Lack of understanding of purpose	5	14	1	14	3	13
Difficulty in mastering phonics	25	2	8	4	26	1
Difficulty in developing fluency	3	15	1	14	-	
Lack of suitable materials	10	11	6	7	6	9
Lack of motivation	11	10	3	11	8	8
Lack of concentration	17	6	3	11	9	7
Emotional difficulties	7	13	4	10	11	6
Difficulties in individual help	10	11	-		3	13
Diagnosing problems	1	17	-		-	
Problems of classroom organisation	1	17	1	14	-	
Lack of continuity of schooling	3	16	2	13	2	15

From Table 1, analysing the responses of the whole group, it can be seen that the main areas with which children have difficulty in learning to read are, in order of importance:

(5). Difficulties associated with language and speech

(2) Problems of auditory discrimination

(9) Difficulties in mastering phonic stages

(3) Difficulties of visual discrimination

(4) Problems associated with memory span

(7) Unhelpful parental attitudes

(6) Lack of experiences in the home

The area which received most comment was concerned with children's language and speech; there was a close link here also with unhelpful parental attitudes and lack of experience in the home. Where teachers had given reasons for the children's difficulties they often mentioned too much television viewing and lack of conversation with adults at home - especially where mothers were out at work.

The difficulties with language and speech were common to all groups and therefore research which would investigate ways in which children could overcome inadequate language development, would be welcomed by teachers.

There are links between auditory discrimination, visual discrimination, short memory span and the mastering of phonic stages. The emphasis here is on the skills which a child brings to the learning process. It seems fairly certain that teachers need help in reviewing the knowledge which exists about the elements which make up the total skill of reading. Guidance is needed in identifying stages in acquiring perceptual skills and relating the skills to the child's stage of development.

There is stress on unhelpful parental attitudes and how these adversely affect reading: this could illustrate the increasing awareness of the shared role between parent and teacher in supporting the child who is learning to read, and the necessity of finding ways of involving parents. Many of the problems stem from lack of awareness and knowledge in the part of the parent.

From Table 2 it will be seen that in the Infant group a significant number of teachers commented on the lack of vocabulary, conversation, and knowledge of nursery rhymes and stories, in children just starting school. One other area which was strongly emphasised by this group was lack of concentration on the part of the children. In this connection it was mentioned that children do not listen and it was necessary to find means of giving them help to do this. Emotional difficulties in learning were clearly stressed by remedial teachers, and the sense of failure which prevents a child from learning might be avoided if his problem had been ascertained earlier in his school life.

Question 2. What are the main difficulties you have found in teaching children to read?

Table 3. Overall Analysis.

Areas.	Number of Responses	Order of Importance
Physical difficulties	4	18
Auditory discrimination	21	7
Visual discrimination	13	10
Poor retention	11	14
Restricted language	32	3
Lack of suitable experiences	8	15
Unhelpful parental attitudes	12	13
Lack of understanding of purpose	6	16
Difficulty in mastering phonics	28	5
Difficulty in developing fluency	13	10
Lack of suitable materials	43	2
Lack of motivation	31	4
Lack of concentration	13	10
Emotional difficulties	22	6
Difficulties in giving individual help	99	1
Diagnosing problems	15	8
Problems of classroom organisation	14	9
Lack of continuity of schooling	6	16

Table 4. Analysis by Groups.

Areas.	Infant		Junior		Remedial	
	No.Responses	Importance	No.Responses	Importance	No.Responses	Importance
Physical difficulties	2	16	1	14	1	17
Auditory discrimination	9	6	2	9	10	5
Visual discrimination	5	12	1	14	7	8
Poor retention	5	12	1	14	5	10
Restricted language	25	4	5	4	12	4
Lack of suitable experiences	4	14	2	9	2	16
Unhelpful parental attitudes	7	8	2	9	3	15
Lack of understanding of purpose	1	17	-		5	10
Difficulty in mastering phonics	13	5	5	4	10	5
Difficulty in developing fluency	9	6	4	6	-	
Lack of suitable materials	22	2	8	2	13	3
Lack of motivation	16	3	6	3	9	7
Lack of concentration	7	8	2	9	4	12
Emotional difficulties	3	15	3	8	16	2
Difficulties in individual help	57	1	22	1	20	1
Diagnosing problems	7	8	4	6	4	12
Problems of classroom organisation	6	11	2	9	6	9
Lack of continuity of schooling	2	17	-		4	12

From Table 3, analysing the responses of the whole group, it can be seen that the main areas where teachers have the most difficulty in teaching children to read are, in order of importance:

(15) Problems of giving individual help

(11) Difficulties created by lack of suitable materials

(5) Difficulties of language and speech problems

(12) Lack of motivation on the part of the children

(9) Difficulties in mastering phonic stages

(14) Emotional difficulties

(2) Problems of auditory discrimination

All groups clearly identified the problem involved in trying to give each child individual attention. The size of classes and needs of individual children appear to be a major consideration which could reflect the more informal approaches in both Infant and Junior schools. In general teachers felt the need for smaller classes, more adult help in the classroom, and experienced help from specialists.

The need for more interesting and suitable materials could well be associated with the problems of giving individual help. There was a fairly general dissatisfaction with the materials being used.

The problems of auditory discrimination link with difficulties in mastering the phonic stages. The idea was often expressed that research to show stages of teaching phonics would be helpful. It seems that any help in the early blending stages would be appreciated.

From Table 4 it can be seen that in the Infant group, the problem of speech and language was especially emphasised. Teachers feel that children are coming to school very poorly equipped to cope with reading, and some guidance seems to be required as to <u>how</u> the teacher can build up the child's facility with language, and how she can cope with slovenly language.

In the Junior group the reasons given for being unable to give individual help are not always identified. It was sometimes due to lack of knowledge on the part of the teacher, and sometimes to problems created by informal classroom organisation.

Emotional difficulties assume more significance with the Remedial and Junior groups than with the Infants. Teachers indicated a need to know more about how to help a child to overcome his own sense of failure.

Regarding the responses to both Questions 1 and 2, there must obviously be a close relationship between the difficulties of teaching and learning. In both areas language and speech problems were stressed, and this is felt to be the most important area for research in learning difficulties, and was listed third in importance as a teaching problem. Difficulties in mastering phonic stages ranked third in learning

difficulties and fifth in teaching difficulties and would seem to be the next most important area.

The needs of individual children came through as a major consideration which seems to indicate that teachers value informal approaches in Education. The concern about the nature and operation of the skill of reading however, reflects an appreciation of the structure needed in a reading situation.

Question 3. In what areas in the teaching of reading would you welcome help and advice?

Table 5. Overall Analysis.

Areas.	Number of Responses	Order of Importance
Advice on suitable activities	23	4
Need for specific material	26	3
Advice in pre-reading and reading readiness	11	13
Advice on perceptual skills	14	8
Advice on reading materials	14	8
Advice on teaching different aspects of phonics	22	6
Advice on language and speech	12	12
Advice on diagnosing difficulties	23	4
Advice on teaching the slow learner	43	1
Advice on developing advanced skills	13	11
The need for help in the classroom	32	2
Advice on classroom organisation	7	15
Need for smaller classes	9	14
Advice on encouraging parents to help	4	16
Need for reference booklets	20	7
Need for more training	14	8
Need for inspection of new materials	4	16

Table 6. Analysis by Groups.

Areas.	Infant		Junior		Remedial	
	No.Responses	Importance	No.Responses	Importance	No.Responses	Importance
Advice on suitable activities	12	5	9	1	2	13
Need for specific material	11	6	9	1	6	7
Advice in pre-reading and reading readiness	9	7	1	11	1	15
Advice on perceptual skills	4	13	1	11	9	3
Advice on reading materials	13	3	-		1	15
Advice on teaching different aspects of phonics	13	3	2	10	7	5
Advice on language and speech	5	11	-		7	5
Advice on diagnosing difficulties	9	7	4	6	10	2
Advice on teaching the slow learner	19	1	7	4	17	1
Advice on developing advanced skills	4	13	4	6	5	9
The need for help in the classroom	18	2	8	3	6	7
Advice on classroom organisation	2	15	1	11	4	10
Need for smaller classes	7	9	-		2	13
Advice on encouraging parents to help	-		3	9	1	15
Need for reference booklets	5	11	6	5	9	3
Need for more training	6	10	4	6	4	10
Need for inspection of new materials	1	16	-		3	12

From Table 5, analysing the responses of the whole group, it can be seen that the six most important areas where help and advice were needed, were, in order of importance:

(9) Advice on teaching the slow learner and children with specific difficulties.

(11) Need for help in the classroom and from outside advisors

(2) Need for specific items of material and apparatus

(1) Advice on suitable games, activities, materials and apparatus.

(8) Advice on diagnosing difficulties and diagnostic measures

(15) Need for reference booklets n specific aspects of reading

There is an obvious link between areas 8, 9 and 11, indicating a real need on the part of many of the teachers responding to know more about - and for help with - diagnosing and treating the slow learner and children with reading difficulties. It is also interesting to note the need for reference booklets, and the topics which could be covered by them, for examples, lists of games and activities, descriptions and evaluations of materials and apparatus.

From Table 6 it can be seen that the order of priorities of needs does vary somewhat among the three groups. Even so the above six areas are of concern to all the three groups of teachers taken separately. If this sample is a fairly typical one then research in these areas is needed, and equally important is the need for the dissemination of research findings in these areas to teachers, in a relevant, meaningful way.

Final Note.

This research project was not carried out with the intention of finding out where research in reading was most needed. As was pointed out earlier, the project was underway when the U.K.R.A. was approached by the Bullock Committee. Nevertheless, the aspects of learning and teaching of reading which are causing difficulties for children and teachers must be considered as areas worthy of research if future research is to affect classroom practices and standards of reading are to improve.

June, 1973.

D.V. Thackray.

J.A. Markham.